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ABSTRACT

The works of John Dewey and John Childs are reviewed with reference to the implications for research inherent in society's moral choice to provide a democratic education for its children. The selectivity of the educational system represents a moral choice in that it is a deliberate structuring of learning tasks, formulated by adults, for the "good" of children, but excluding some alternative forms of education. According to Dewey, in order to provide a framework for the democratic philosophy of education, educators must adhere to the principles that education provide an experience in which a genuine problem is presented as a stimulus to thought and in which students are provided with sufficient information to deal with the problem, suggested solutions, and the opportunity to test their ideas. Childs' interpretation of Dewey's democratic tenets is that the cultivation of thinking is central both to the means and the end of education. He states that according to Dewey's tenets, the scientific method is the only adequate means to achieve the moral end of democratic education. Thus, if a system voluntarily assumes the label of "democratic education," it would follow that any such system would be actively engaged in educational research according to the scientific method. The commitment to educational research becomes a crucial issue. The final question is: how can educators in good conscience call our educational system democratic when many professionals rely on dogmatic, teacher-based authority rather than scientifically tested techniques, criteria, and content?
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DEMOCRACY IN AMERICAN EDUCATION: RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Robin D. Avery, Ph. D

I. The Nature and Character of Philosophy of Education

What is the purpose of education, and how should it be structured? Do we, in fact, practice "democratic" education in our "democratic" society? These questions must be answered in order to establish an ethical and practical framework for education at any level. Further, educators must realize the implications of their philosophical commitment if they are to maintain objectivity and increase the effectiveness of their share of education.

Inherit the Wind, a play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, is based upon the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial." Cates (Scopes) is accused of teaching "godless" evolution, according to Darwin, in a small town classroom. During the trial, Drummond (Darrow) addresses the bench:

> I am trying to establish, Your Honor, that Howard--or Colonel Brady--or Charles Darwin--or anyone in this courtroom--or you, sir--has the right to think![1]

Thinking, or reasoning if you prefer, is the major rationale for education. But what or how should we think? The Scopes trial is merely one dramatic example of the constant educational struggle which is being waged against the tyranny of thought in education. But the danger is that in our pursuit of "free thought" in education, we may tyrannize that which we most desire by excluding selectively other methods, persuasions, beliefs, and techniques than our own (which are obviously best). So, before this dilemma can be reduced to manageable proportions, some sense of the nature and character of the philosophy of education must be reached. Otherwise, how can one consciously comprehend what he is about in the classroom? Further, how can we rationalize our choice of instruction to the exclusion of all others?

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The dilemma is rhetorical, but there exist some concrete treatments of the issue: what is and/or should education be all about. In contemporary society we should be engaged in "evaluating competing normative proposals"[2] keeping in mind their historical perspectives. Dewey suggests that education is, in itself, universal and "that there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education."[3] Champlin and Villemain extend this notion to suggest that education must transcend cognitive and affective dimensions toward the ultimate goal of "the infinite reconstruction of qualitative intelligence."[4]

But is it enough to assert these goals as fundamental to the improvement of education? If education is an end in itself, only subordinate to more education, can we assume that moral (and therefore good) outcomes will be the result of such an enterprise? How are we to measure our efforts and those of our students as a reflection of a continuing evaluation of these competing normative proposals for the best possible educational enterprise? If this can be done as a regularly performed critique, how can we be assured that such assessment will add to the accumulating bodies of knowledge for the benefit of future generations of students and teachers?

II. The Moral Character of Deliberate Education.

The essence of the value of the educational enterprise can be seen in the works of John Childs:

> Hence the curriculum of a school is an index to the values of the particular human group that founds the school. It is because some conception of what is humanly significant and desirable is implicit in all nurture of the young that we may say without exaggeration that each program of deliberate education is, by nature, a moral undertaking.[5]

The key words are "deliberate education" and "moral undertaking," establishing this premise: that all education is structured by adults in a society as a deliberate and moral enterprise. Whether the society is totalitarian or pluralistic, the structure is viewed by the participating adults as moral. This is

not to categorize such plans as inherently existential, based on the notion of selectivity. Some may view education as totally individualistic, and thereby existentially motivated and controlled. But this view ignores Child's observation of adult control -- hence adult responsibility for the outcomes of any educational undertaking. A system of education has been adopted in every society as "better" than some other system, and it therefore becomes "an index to the values of the particular human group that founds the school." On this basis, then, no system of education can be defined as existential or, in common terms, "up to the individual."

Childs considers, on the basis of Dewey's comments on "processes of instruction" and "essentials of method,"[6] that education achieves its relevancy and justified morality through the structured nurturing of the young:

> The moral insistence of the new education that we cease viewing childhood as a mere preparation for a remote future and seek instead a school that would increase the meaning of present experience, was not the product of indifference to the demands of adult life; it was rather a product of the insight that the best possible preparation for the future is found in the most significant living in the present.[7]

The primary significance of this distinction is the assertion that the morality of education is a dynamic force rather than a passive state of indifference toward the young. If a society is to prepare adequately its junior members through education, then it becomes the challenge of the adults to provide meaningful insights for the young from "the most significant living in the present."

Thus, the selectivity of education is its morality. That is, if one form of selection is done as opposed to another, the assumption is that an adult group has been able to determine by some means that which is "most significant" from their point of view. This is clearly a value judgment, and is thereby moral by virtue of the fact of excluding other possible choices of that which could be considered by others as "most significant." It is in this sense, then, that all

education is moral: a deliberate structuring of learning tasks, formulated by adults for the "good" of children, but excluding some (possibly many) alternate forms of instruction.

III. The Democratic Theme in Educational Philosophy

Champlin asserts that "an open, critical and creative mind is both the end and the means of a democratic education."[8] But, he then proceeds to ask many rhetorical questions relating to the multivariate improbabilities that this premise can be realized in the real world of education. But this does not render the challenge any lesser degree of importance. If the democratic philosophy holds for us the "most significant" means toward achievement of the moral end which our society seeks for its youth, then we are obligated to defend that choice by understanding its implications and acting accordingly.

The essential question is: does the democratic philosophy provide a workable framework for education in our society? It does if, according to Dewey and Childs, we adhere to the fundamental democratic principles. Dewey lists five: 1) that education provide "a genuine situation of experience;" 2) "that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought;" 3) that the student is provided sufficient information to "make the observations needed to deal with it;" 4) that the student be provided with "suggested solutions . . .which he shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way;" and 5) that the student "have the opportunity and occasion to test his ideas by application to make their meaning clear and to discover for himself their validity."[9] Childs' interpretation of this set of democratic tenets is that "for Dewey, the cultivation of thinking is central in his view of both the end and the means of education."[10] Further, Childs holds that "the deepest disciple of mind results when the young acquire because they are encouraged to inquire."[11] Thus, democracy in education is not merely the

development and encouragement of free and open inquiry. If we are to follow its guidelines, the responsibilities of all persons involved in the learning process are immense! We must, as teachers, offer students enriching experiences -- not some comfortable, self-satisfying substitute. The system (including teachers) is responsible to provide ample relevant information in order to encourage thought. In addition, we must raise issues (problems), suggest solutions and encourage students to suggest their own solutions, and guide students in testing the validity of their hypotheses and related evidence. This acquisition/inquiry combination, according to Childs, provides the moral justification for the democratic learning experience.

This is not a simple explanation for an accepted system of education. It cannot be presumed that all support the responsibilities and implications of democratic education. Mere cursory readings of current writings in educational philosophy amply demonstrate this lack of consensus concerning the democratic theme. For instance, Girvetz (et al.) devotes a good deal of his text to contemporary problems of epistemology, ontology, methodology, and a diversity of other considerations to the end that the democratic dilemma in education will be clarified, to some extent, for the reader.[12] Further evidence of this controversy can be found in a recent article by Henry W. Hodysh where he suggests that Dewey's defense of the democratic theme is weak regarding historical investigation.

> That Dewey prefers to appraise problems with an eye to the moral meaning of democracy is not necessarily a fault. It becomes so, however, when he presumes that democracy must act as the referent for ethical inquiry into history. . . .Other problems arise when the historian entertains the possibility of "moving the present to a certain kind of future," recognizing that in the process he arbitrarily chooses one value system in preference to another. In doing this, he must assess and interpret actual history and project the direction of movement to an as yet unknown but in some ways predictable future -- a future which must account for a continuous reconstruction of the idea of democracy. Such is the historian's task.

Hodysh concludes, "Dewey has confused the purpose and method of the historian with that of the reformer, thereby failing to recognize the uniqueness of either."[14]

Notwithstanding the vagueness of Hodysh's use of the term "uniqueness," it is clear that the democratic theme in education has not evolved to a position of dominance in theory or in practice. Many argue that it is the only moral way we can solve our educational problems, but the controversy still continues.

IV. The Concept of Method in Philosophy and Education

If we can assume that democratic instruction is the most moral philosophy of education, and it is not clear that we can, another question is raised: what method(s) should be employed to insure genuinely democratic, moral outcomes? Childs suggests that "the characteristic of a democratic program of education which distinguishes it from all authoritarian programs, is the fact that it seeks to make the growth of each child the supreme objective."[15] Further, he asserts that "the good life is a community affair."[16] And even if these statements are true, the question still remains: which method will most effectively promote individual and collective educational growth toward the good life? Because of the relationship of these considerations, it is clear that philosophy and method are inseparable in education.

The method of science, according to Dewey's five points, would seem to be the only adequate means to achieve the moral end of democratic education. But, this argument is no clearer than the issue of whether democracy is, in fact, the most moral philosophy of education. Hodysh suggests that Dewey, in his historical and empirical defense of democratic education, manipulates history to fit his democratic purposes. Thereby, Dewey is being charged with usurping the prerogative of the historian. But is it fair to charge that Dewey is failing to

consider alternative methods of inquiry or that he is unjustly entering the sacred domain of a theoretically distinct discipline? Such a charge is similar to Hintikka's rejection of Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum": that it is vague.[17] Certainly it is vague, and Descartes intended it as such! In fact, one could argue similarly about anything -- philosophical or tangible. I fail to see where Dewey is in any way abusing some undefined historical prerogative. It is clear that he is intentionally establishing the guidelines for inquiry which happen to coincide with those employed within the construct we call the method of science. These rules are intentionally vague because they are generalized guidelines -- the systematic means toward the end of morally democratic education. Further, Dewey uses evidence of history scientifically, complementing his stated methodology, and not in an irresponsible, pseudo-historical manner. Therefore, when all possible methods are reduced to their basic philosophical ingredients (sources of authority), two alternatives are available: dogmatic authority or the authority of expectation (the method of science). Faced with this ultimate choice, Dewey had no philosophical alternative to the method of science. No other method could allow "democratic inquiry." Therefore, according to Dewey and Childs, other sources of authority are, in essence, undemocratic as they have defined democracy and morality in education. Such charges of the democratic "reformers" in education, then, constitute an inaccurate consideration of the philosophical beliefs, or the proposed methodology, or both. I find no such contradiction in the works of either Childs or Dewey.

V. A Crucial Issue in Education: Philosophy and Educational Research

According to Childs, education can only be equated with morality inasmuch as it enhances the community's capacity to achieve the good life.[18] In the last of his five democratic principles, Dewey calls for a major emphasis on the establishment of validity of educational ideas.[19] Thus, if a system voluntarily assumes the label of "democratic education," it would follow that any such system would be actively engaged in educational research, according to the

scientific method. How else could validity and/or moral contributions for the good of society be established? Other methods entail dogmatic authority, and would therefore be undemocratic. Then, the proponent of democratic education is forced, by virtue of his basic philosophical commitment, to research and evaluate his efforts according to the method of science.

The commitment of educational research becomes a crucial issue in education depending upon its emphasis within the learning process. Scientific investigation depends upon it, for without established validity, periodicaly reevaluated, "educational science" becomes a blatant misnomer.[20] We must therefore set parameters for our investigations into democratic educational activity, test scientifically for validity, reach conclusions, formulate hypotheses, accumulate more related evidence, retest, reach new conclusions, ad infinitum. If the commitment to democratic education is real, we will research our efforts constantly to improve the learning process.

Are we doing our fair share of educational research? Are we following Dewey's fifth principle -- to test for validity? His charge to education in this respect is purposely vague; it is general and open-ended, implying unlimited responsibility. How many of us regularly evaluate curriculum and consciously update our research skills? And how many of us even have any research skills? A recent article in the Phi Delta Kappan provides a case in point which, I think, typifies the lack of educational research operative in American education. A research specialist from a university tested some high school teachers on their ability to achieve consensus concerning grading practices, among other things. They failed miserably. His final comment to the group was, "tell me please--just tell me--what right do you have to grade other people's children?"[21] Such a situation is all too frequent in American education. How can we in good conscience call our educational system domocratic when, in reality, many "professionals" rely on

dogmatic, teacher-based authority rather than scientifically tested techniques, criteria and content?

It is the lack of emphasis, therefore, which makes educational research a crucial issue. And if one follows the tenets of Childs and Dewey, he cannot escape his responsibility to become skillful in the areas of educational testing and evaluation. Otherwise, one becomes only partially democratic in his educational philosophy. Then the question would become, who decides which part is democratic and which part is not? This would certainly be a most undemocratic means of administering "democratic" education. Do we not face such a dilemma?

Footnotes

[1]Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, Inherit the Wind, (New York: Bantam books, 1960), p. 64.

[2]Nathaniel L. Champlin, "Education and Philosophical Thought," in Studies in Philosophy and Education, ed. by Archibald W. Anderson, et al., Vol. III No. 1, Summer, 1963, p. 27.

[3]John Dewey, Democracy and Education, (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 60.

[4]Francis T. Villemain and Nathaniel L. Champlin, "Frontiers for an Experimentalist Philosophy of Education," in The Antioch Review, Fall, 1959, p. 359.

[5]John L. Childs, Education and Morals, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), p. 7.

[6]John Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 180.

[7]John L. Childs, Education and Morals, p. 148.

[8]Nathaniel L. Champlin, "The Open, Critical and Creative Mind: The Challenge and Risk," an abstract of an address presented to the Intercollegiate Association of Women Students' Convention, Wayne State University, October 21, 1967.

[9]John Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 192.

[10]John L. Childs, Education and Morals, p. 152.

[11]John L. Childs, Education and Morals, p. 153.

[12]Harry Girvetz, et al., ed., Science, Folklore, and Philosophy (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 291-396, 471-538.

[13]Henry W. Hodysh, "Historical Theory and Social Change in John Dewey's Philosophy," in Educational Theory, ed. by William O. Stanley, et al., Vol. XX No. 3, Summer, 1970, p. 251.

[14]Hodysh, op. cit., p. 252.

[15]John S. Childs, Education and Morals, p. 155.

[16]Childs, op. cit., p. 155.

[17]Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?" in Philosophy Today No. 3, ed. by Jerry H. Gill, (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 188-196.

[18]John L. Childs, Education and Morals, p. 155.

[19]John Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 192.

[20]May Brodbeck, "Logic and Scientific Method in Research in Teaching." in Handbook of Research on Teaching, ed. by N. L. Gage, (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963), pp. 59-93.

[21]Sidney Simon, et al., "The Day the Consultant Looked at our Grading System," in Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. LI No. 9, May, 1970, p. 11.